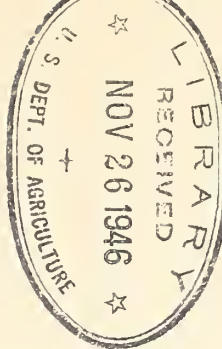


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Excerpt from a radio talk by
W. R. M. Wharton, chief of the
Eastern District, Food and Drug
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Serial No. 31

HOW TO READ THE LABEL

Edible Oils

The principal oils which are sold on the American market for edible use are: Olive oil, cottonseed oil, corn or maize oil, peanut oil, sesame, rapeseed, and soybean oil. Olive oil is always sold under its own name. Cottonseed oil is frequently sold under its own name but is likewise often sold under the name "salad oil." Corn oil is sold under its own name, under fanciful names, and sometimes under the name "salad oil." Peanut oil, rapeseed oil, soybean oil and sesame oil are practically never sold at retail under their own names, but are practically always called "salad oil." The term "salad oil" likewise may apply to a mixture of any two or more of these oils.

In general, you should be able to buy any of the oils named as such or as "salad oil" at less than half the price you will pay for good olive oil.

Olive oil is a fruit oil, since the olive is a fruit. It is produced in the various countries located in the Mediterranean Basin, including France, Italy, Spain, Greece, Africa, and Turkey. It is also produced in California. In general, olive oil produced in the uplands away from the sea is of light color, with bland, sweet and fruity taste, whereas olive oil produced in the low lands of the Mediterranean shores has a deep yellow color, a pronounced heavy characteristic taste with a tendency to a sharp bitterlike flavor. Since the several countries of production around the Mediterranean sea produce both the bland and heavily flavored olive oils, since the heavy oils are often refined and blended for American shipment, and since there is some exchange of oils between the several producing countries, it is difficult to associate with any particular country of origin any definite qualities of color, odor, and taste.

Therefore, the terms "French," "Italian" or "Spanish" on olive oil labels do not necessarily indicate relative quality characteristics. Moreover, it is practically impossible for any one to determine with certainty, by examination, the country of origin of any particular lot of olive oil.

In general, in the American trade, the French Olive Oils, which usually sell for the highest price, run from yellow to very light yellow in color and have a pleasing, bland, fruity and mildly olive-like taste.

The Italian Olive Oils vary from rather light straw color in the finer grades to oils with a distinct greenish tint in the lower grades. They run from pleasingly bland and mild in taste to strong, the strong having a pronounced characteristic olive flavor with acrid characteristics, in some cases, or a sharp flavor, such a flavor as leaves a slight burning sensation on the palate caused by acidity.

The Spanish Olive Oils of the hill country are light colored bland oils of high quality and the American trade in the United States for the most part receive oils of this character when buying Spanish Olive Oil. Spain is the largest producing country of olive oil and large quantities of oils called "corriente" or ordinary quality oils are produced there. Such oils when imported into the United States are generally consumed by those who prefer the less expensive heavily flavored types of olive oils or else they are used for blending purposes.

The Grecian Olive Oils, in general, are the darkest in color and the strongest in flavor, and the Tunisian, Algerian or African Oils are mostly similar to the Spanish. California Olive Oil is usually light yellow, although sometimes it has a greenish tint, is bland, sweet and nutty in flavor.

Olive oils, are often blended so as to produce a uniform product when sold by brand name. The difficulty with this procedure from the consumers' standpoint is that olive oils which are sold by brand name, and especially those that are extensively advertised, sometimes are sold at higher prices than other brands equally as good or better in quality. My advice to the label readers, then, is to look for a brand of olive oil until you find one which suits your taste and which is not sold at the very top prices, for if you will take the trouble you will probably find what you want at comparatively reasonable prices. Whenever you buy olive oil be very certain always to read the label to assure yourself that the package is labeled, "olive oil" and that there are no qualifying phrases on the label which show the product to be something else, or olive oil mixed with some other oil. A product labeled Olive oil may be relied upon to be pure olive oil. This is the most important advice that I can give the label readers, since a great many ingenious methods have been tried, to create the impression that oil, not olive oil, is olive oil. Of some of these I will speak later.

The terms "Virgin" or "Verge" or "Extra Virgin" are often employed on olive oil labels. These terms were originally employed to differentiate first pressings from other pressings of olive oil. They were also used in connection with first quality products, but the words have been overworked and possibly now have no particular significance with respect to quality.

The same may be said with respect to the terms "Supreme," and "Superfine" and other superlatives, whether expressed in English or other languages. These terms occur on olive oil labels but they do not mean

very much. They have lost whatever original significance they had due to indiscriminate use.

The label reader will encounter some labels on olive oil which declare the product to be medicinal olive oil; or the term "U.S.P." will be used on the label. The letters, "U.S.P.", are the initial letters of "U.S. Pharmacopoeia." When so labeled, olive oil must conform to the requirements and tests laid down in the Pharmacopoeia. Practically all pure olive oil meets these tests so that these terms do not give you any additional assurances of purity over the assurance conveyed by the words olive oil themselves.

Cottonseed oil, a refined oil from cotton seed, is a light yellow bland oil with no particular characteristic flavor. Corn oil, a refined oil obtained from the germ of corn, is usually lighter in color than cottonseed oil, is bland, has a slight odor and flavor of corn. Sesame oil, a refined oil obtained from sesame seed, is of rather a dark yellow color, it is bland and without pronounced flavor, and has a tendency to become rancid and develop a rancid flavor. Rapeseed and mustard seed oil are of various shades of yellow. If well refined, they are bland, but if not properly refined, they have strong characteristic flavors. Peanut oil, a refined oil from peanuts, is quite light in color, is bland and has a flavor which suggests peanuts. Soybean oil, refined oil from soybeans, is light in color, is bland and without any particular characteristic flavor. These are all vegetable oils.

When you buy salad oil there will be delivered to you a product labeled, "Salad Oil," "Table Oil," or "Vegetable Oil," and these will uniformly be composed either of cottonseed oil, or corn oil, or some one of the vegetable oils I have named, or a mixture of these. Some times the label will declare the kind of oil contained, as for example, "Salad Oil, composed of pure cottonseed oil." On the other hand, other labels will declare the product to be "Salad Oil, composed of vegetable oils." You may be sure that any product labeled as salad oil, or table oil, or vegetable oil, is not olive oil.

The salad oils or table oils or vegetable oils are desirable products of good quality and they serve useful purposes in the diet. Indeed, these oils are preferred by some who do not especially relish the taste of olive oil, and such oils sell for a price less than half that asked for olive oil.

It is essential that you read labels on this class of products because, as I have already said, many labels are designed with the intention of misleading you. A label may have a picture of an olive tree with figures dressed in the garb of Italian peasants gathering the fruit. This is perfectly legitimate upon a can of olive oil, but when depicted upon a can which is inconspicuously labeled cottonseed oil or salad oil, the design is apt to be misleading unless the purchaser carefully reads all of the label. In some cases, the olive tree design has given way to

a tree of nondescript character. Nevertheless, the buyer often mistakes such a pictorial design to represent an olive oil product, when as a matter of fact, the cans will be found to be labeled, salad oil, cottonseed oil, or corn oil, if you read the labels carefully- Similarly, the use of Italian, or Spanish flags or a prominent display of the Italian national colors, red, white, and green, or a coat of arms, or a regal crown, or foreign coins and medals, or a picture of an Italian army officer, or a view of the Bay of Naples and dozens of similar devices may be used to convey the impression that the product consists of imported olive oil. Furthermore, the use of brand names suggesting Italy, France, or Spain, or some city or locality in these countries such as, Termini Imerese brand or Lucca brand, are sometimes found on salad oil labels. These and foreign language statements on salad oil labels are generally intended to convey the impression that the product is imported olive oil. Of course, if these designs and devices are employed on a can of olive oil produced where claimed, they are perfectly legitimate. However, if used on salad oil, they are misleading. It is for this reason that you must read labels carefully and not be guided by first impressions which labels give you. Sometimes you will find the expression "Salad oil, flavored with pure olive oil" - on a label and often the arrangement and size of lettering, will cause the words, "Olive oil" to stand out most prominently. In general, such a product is no better than any other salad oil.

Table oils are often put up in packages short of the volume required for a gallon, a quart, and a pint, and frequently you find such short volume packages labeled .97 of a gallon, or .97 of a quart. If you read labels, you will not think that you are getting a full quantity when you buy such packages.

You will encounter cottonseed oils labeled with the term, "Winter Pressed." This term means that the oil, after pressing from the seed, has been allowed to settle at a temperature low enough to separate out and remove a large percentage of the stearin in the oil, after which the oil will remain clear after bottling or packaging when exposed to winter temperatures. Without such treatment the oil would, on becoming cold, turn cloudy, or even assume a semi-solid appearance, because of a flocculent precipitate of stearin which appears on chilling.